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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate how ten advanced Taiwanese English as a Foreign Language college students comprehend and interpret two English short stories--"The Discus Thrower" and "A Passage to India." Two types of data were gathered for this study: verbal self-reporting and post-reading responses. Oral interviews were used to analyze, interpret, generate themes, and to generally debrief the participants. Based on this analysis, four themes on reading emerged (sense-making, communication, reflexivity, and recontextualization) and are discussed in depth. Sense-making deals with how the participants made sense of the texts by searching for meaning flexibly and inflexibly. Communication deals with how they handled reading dissatisfaction and suspense. Reflexivity deals with situations where participants reflected upon themselves as in their roles as readers, thinkers, and learners. During recontextualization, participants changed their interpretations, previous understandings, and reading stances while they re-read the texts. Conclusions are fourfold: teachers should respect students' meaning-making of the texts and try not to impart their own interpretations; the reader response approach should include ungraded journals and free-writing as well as oral reflection; students should be encouraged to embrace difficulty, ambiguity, confusion, and divergence and not shun them; the level of reader flexibility is itself rather flexible, varying with the readers' orientations, assumptions, and beliefs from one text to the next. Two appendices containing the two English short stories, are included. (Contains 28 references.) (Author/KFT)

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READING AS TRANSACTION IN EFL: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS

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Running head: reading as transaciton

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate how ten advanced Taiwanese EFL college students comprehend and interpret two English short stories. Two types of data were gathered for this study: verbal self-reporting, post-reading responses, whereas oral interviews were used to analyze, interpret, generate themes, and to debrief these two types of data as well. Based upon the analysis, four themes -- reading as sense-making, as communication, as reflexivity, and as re-contextualization -- were generated and discussed in-depth. **Sense-making** dealt with how participants made sense of the texts by searching for meaning flexibly/inflexibly. **Communication,** on the other hand, dealt with how participants dealt with reading dissatisfication and suspense. **Reflexivity** dealt with the situations when participants stood back to see and reflect upon themselves as the roles of readers, thinkers, and learners. During **re-contextualization,** participants changed their interpretations, previous understandings, reading stances while they were allowed to re-read the texts. The pedagogical implications suggest that teachers should broaden their views of reading instruction and, furthermore, should provide a rich learning environment for students to make personal meaning through the transactional process.

Key words:sense-making, reflexivity, re-contextualization, verbal self-reports, post-reading responses, comparative content analsyis, thematic analysis.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the past two decades, many reading researchers on learning English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) have tried to determine the extent to which the first-language (L1) reading theories can be applied to ESL/EFL reading situations. Resulting from the schematic and interactional research, ESL/EFL researchers and teachers have already come to better understand what good and many not-so-good ESL/EFL readers do (Carrell, Devine, & Eskey, 1989; Barnett, 1989; Eskey & Grabe, 1989; Block, 1992; Chi, 1994). ESL/EFL readers are now viewed as being at least as important as the text, and reading is viewed as an interactive process between the reader and the text (Grabe, 1991). If a reader is not actively using one's background knowledge, a significant part of the reading process isn't taking place, and the construction of meaning suffers.

However, the interactional view of reading has not radically changed our beliefs with regard to the nature of reading and of readers in ESL/EFL. Reading ability is still evaluated by readers' linguistic performance and their reading comprehension is judged by how much they are able to remember or recall from the text (Haynes & Carr, 1990). Behind such beliefs, meaning is seen as objective, atomistic, systematic, and portable. That is, reading is valued as a commodity and texts are the only resource of meaning. If we accept meaning-making as the paramount path toward no longer be treated as "finished products," to be taught by decoding, analysis, and explanation (Ruddell & Singer, 1994). Literary texts should not be seen as vehicles for the detailed study of usage (structures and forms), but as springboards for language use (i.e. true communication) (Davis, 1989; Cairney, 1990). Using this approach literary texts can provide students with opportunities for critical reading, questioning, negotiating, and the expression of meaning, as well as communication, interpretation and the exchange of meanings (Cook, 1994). Furthermore, literary texts can serve as efficient vehicles for cultural awareness in foreign language acquisition (Pugh, 1989). Thus, we need to seek ways of expanding ESL/EFL students' power as language users and learners and our underlying beliefs of reading comprehension should be broadened and enriched by more recent reading theories, such as the transactional theory.

In Rosenblatt's "The reader, the text, the poem" (1992), she uses the word "poem" as a metaphor to indicate the nature of the reader-text relationship. For Rosenblatt, a "poem" is generated from the transaction between the text and the reader, and is seen as an event in time. The "poem" is what happens when the text is brought into the reader's mind and the words of the text begin to function symbolically, evoking -- in the transaction -- images, emotion, and concepts. That is, reading a text not only elicits reader's knowledge of language and of the world, but also calls forth their feelings, images, memories, and associations. In this transactive process, both the reader and the text contribute to the construction of meaning and each shape and are shaped by the other. Using the transactional view of reading, reading in ESL/EFL is a cooperation -- a meeting of minds -- between reader and author. The author provides the complete work but doesn't tell the reader what to think about it; the reader must strive to understand and to interpret what the author is saying (Rosenblatt, 1985; 1986; 1994). ESL/EFL readers need to be encouraged not to focus primarily on absorbing the greatest amount of text information or, even worse, to know the specific and exact meanings of the text, but to understand that every time a word is used in a new context, it creates new possible meanings, new signs, and new contexts. Meaning does not objectively exist in the text. Words have conventional meanings but are changed and re-created through different readers, texts, and contexts (Sadoski & Paivio, 1991).

For many ESL/EFL learners, the transactional theory provides a broader view of reading, especially reading literary texts, since they have long been taught and eventually believed that they should read an English text only from the author's or the instructor's point of view. The more interpretation and comprehension match their instructor's, the better understanding they have of the text. Consequently, ESL/EFL readers fail to build upon what is meaningful to them and finally they are forced to drop their own preconceptions and to accept what they instructor wishes to construct or how an instructor would interpret the text.

In contrast to the previous interactional research, this study investigated readers' interpretive processes, by using research questions that were drawn directly from participants'

own reading processes. This study revealed that reading constitutes making connections. Such connections postulate the act reading is a process of making meaning and meaning-making is the path between a writer's mind and a reader's mind. Texts become powerful when readers connect the written work with their personal life experiences and involvements. Through such connections, texts become significant and meaningful to readers (Harste, 1988; Beach & Hynds, 1990; Short, 1992). Text is not alive unless some connections can be made.

More importantly, through the power of reading as transaction, readers not only make meanings, but are also transformed in varying degrees after leaving the textual landscapes. Changes result in knowledge creation, language acquisition, and a new self. The process of read as transaction at any moment function as a threshold for continuing meaning construction and creation. Therefore, reading is transaction, by which readers find a meaningfulness in print that is rooted in experience, grows through engagement in texts, and becomes eventually a means for changing the self, not simply an exercise in improved performance. In this study, my participants established their transactional network by sense-making, communication, reflexivity, and re-contextualization and these four paths served as constituents to propel my participants' reading process while reading two short storied written in English.

ABOUT THE STUDY

Participants

Ten advanced Taiwanese EFL college students majoring in four different subject areas participated in this study. They were chosen for (a) their willingness, (b) their verbal ability (c) their academic performance and (d) the result of an English reading test conducted by the researcher. In addition, by gaining insights into more advanced ESL/EFL readers' reading processes, we hoped to be able to help less proficient readers to read more effectively and efficiently. The initial interview I conducted with each of them demonstrated that all participants were capable of verbally expressing their thoughts without obvious difficulty.

Texts

Two short stories, " The Discus Thrower" (appendix 1A) and " A Passage to India" (Appendix 1B) written respectively by Oliver Sacks and Richard Selzer, were selected and evaluated by two English specialists as most suitable literary texts for these advanced college students on the basis of the levels of language and conceptual difficulties. In addition, both stories were selected because they met the following criteria: (A) these stories have been used in other advanced ESL college-level classes, (B) the content was unfamiliar to participants; (C) they contained some ambiguities; (D) they were similar in length (1000 words) and themes (death); and (E) both were short enough to be finished in a single sitting.

Data Collection Procedures

A week before the formal data collection, a brief training session was held to familiarize the participants with the verbal reporting method. I first established rapport with each participant by engaging them in general conversation. The conversation usually centered on their own current study. When participants looked relaxed and comfortable, I explained the process of formal data collection. Participants were informed that they would read two English short stories, and then do given impromptu oral post-reading responses after reading each story.

Two types of data were used for this paper, verbal self-reports during reading and free oral post-reading responses.

(A) Verbal reports during reading (VSR):

Participants were told to read two English short stories and were requested to stop and to report what they thought and felt every time when they encountered the read stars. They were also advised to focus on the reading tasks, not to theorize about their reading behaviors.

(B) Free Oral Post-reading Responses (FOPR):

After completing the initial reading of the text the participants were allowed to have secondary exposures to the text. At the conclusion of this second reading the participants were

asked to make additional oral comments as to how they changed their previous understandings, interpretations, and stances.

Participants were allowed to respond either in Chinese or in English in verbal self-reporting and the post-reading responses. Both the verbal reporting and post-reading data were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis procedures

A total of 20 verbal reporting and 20 post-reading responses to two short stories were gathered. The procedures for analyzing the verbal reporting and post reading responses data are described below.

Generating four themes

In the initial stage, I conducted an extensive and intensive analysis of the contents of the data, making notes as I listened to the tape recordings and read the transcriptions numerous times. I organized groups of related utterances or "topical units", which reflected common perspectives and revealed recurring patterns together as a theme. In order to ensure my data analysis and interpretation, two steps were taken:

(A) I first discussed the study's coding systems with two EFL instructors by providing them with two or three samples of each theme that I had identified and interpreted. Each of them selected two participants from a file, including the verbal reporting and post reading responses. The inter-rater agreement we eventually reached was 81% and 84% and 80% between these two EFL reading specialists themselves.

(B) I checked each participant by an oral interview about the data analysis and interpretation between me and the other two EFL instructors. Any discrepancies were discussed and resolved. The final themes emerged through long conversations and negotiations. The data which produced strong disagreement between me and the participants was dropped from the data

pool. Totally, eight themes were generated, in this paper, four themes are presented and discussed. The four themes identified were reading as sense-making, as reflexivity, as communication, and as re-contextualization.

DISCUSSION

Reading as sense-making

Reading is a sense-making process during which readers have to make personal sense of the text being read. In general, in the very early stage of reading, my participants had to accommodate themselves to the texts, so they were very actively engaged in seeking sense from the authors. In the process of seeking sense, participants concurrently built sense by a variety of reading strategies, including summarizing, paraphrasing, translating, analyzing, elaborating, evaluating, or making inferences from other parts of the text. Gradually, once participants took stances or created a framework for and interest in the reading. They were involved in the personal sense-making process. The sooner the participant made sense of the text, the stronger their meaning generation was. As a result, participants' reading events could be divided into more flexible and less flexible readings. I defined flexibility as the forming and re-forming of the participants' framework of sense-making through continual finding, building, and making sense of the texts. The following examples demonstrate both flexible and inflexible reading events.

[Example 1A]

> *A Pair of shoes? But he has no right leg. First, the patient was described as a tree, a log, and then a sailor, now, he is asking for a pair of shoes. The author loves to use some concrete objects to describe the patient's situations. It is interesting.*

[Example 1B]

> *The first part of the story describes the patient's physical conditions and his surroundings. The second part of the story describes his conversations with the doctor. the third part describes how the nurse and aides respond to this strange behaviors. So, the author looks very detached from the story*

because he simply portraits the patient by different angles or thorough different people's eyes. This is a very interesting story, not like the regular stories that I read before.

[Example 1C]

Well, too many medical terms. I feel I am reading a medical journal. Anyway, I am reading a story, not a medical report. I am reading a story, not a medical report, so I will just skip these words.

[Example 1D]

Rotten like a log? I wondered why the doctor compared the patient with a tree, and now a log. ... A sailor? Why does the author compare him as a sailor standing on a deck? I still don't understand the story.

[Example 1E]

I cannot read this article. this story is too different because there are too many words that I never read before. And I do not have so much medical knowledge.

[Example 1F]

There are many medical terms and I know none of them.
This is a very difficult article.

In the process of flexible reading (Examples 1A, 1B, and 1C), participants usually tended to use broader textual clues as resources for sense-making. Many participants used names, titles, metaphors, writing styles, purpose of reading, and the like and employed more flexible reading strategies, such as comparison, reference, relevance, evaluation, and inference in order to establish their search for meaning in the process of reading. In contrast, however, sometimes, participants as indicated on Example 1D, 1E, and 1F did not intentionally draw a mental blueprint to serve as an ongoing reading framework because they were more willing to follow the author's paths and voices until they felt they had sufficiently accumulated enough understanding to build a "correct" framework. Even worse, they were likely to wait for the author to provide a reading framework and so became controlled by the texts. It, therefore, took a longer time for some participants to realize how important it was to shift stances or to take a position during reading and to realize

that reading was a means of self-discovery and self-exploration. As a result, less flexible readers were not able to evoke as much as meaning from texts as more flexible readers.

To sum up, less flexible reading events make readers always less actively generating expectations and sense-making. Flexible reading events demonstrated a trust in participants' own understandings and did not wait for the authors to supply them with all necessary understandings.

Reading as communication

The process of reading to ESL/EFL readers is so often full of thorns. The reading "thorns" may arise partly from the unwritten elements of the text which requires inferencing to derive meaning, elements by which writers invited readers to participate in a game of "unspoken communication". The inner speech guided participants to tell themselves about the texts, about the task of reading, and also about themselves. Taken together, the self-involved and the task-involved inner speech allowed my participants to modify the self and/or their tasks. In this sense, there was an intermingling of voices arising from the reader-author communications, which were not a straightforward exchange of information, but functioned as a negotiation (Tierney & Gee, 1990), or as a communication (Peterson & Eeds, 1990; Harste, 1992).

In this paper, "reading thorns" referred to as the suspense, anxiety, disappointment, dissatisfication, nervousness, excitement, or fear that grips my participants as they read. Accommodation to such situations is not a smooth process, but one which, in its essence, relies on how readers drive through this force. When my participants perceived any anomaly as indicated above, they started to inquire, doubt, clarify, and search for solutions. Such situations especially occurred when participants were reading "The discus thrower", as the following VSR data from that reading indicates.

[Example 2A]

> *I don't feel satisfied with the ending of the story. The story still leaves a bunch of questions for me as a reader. Why did he throw the plates at the wall every*

morning? Why is he so angry and easy to be irritated? The author doesn't provide any answer for us. The author does not provide any background about the patient. What does he do before? When does he come to live in the hospital? The author only tells me the patient finally dies and the story ends. I still want to know why he gets sick. I am not sure whether he gets cancer. Most importantly, the author does not tell me why or how the patient dies.

[Example 2B]

Does the author give a pair of shoes to him [the patient]? The author never mentions this ... I still do not know why the patient asks for a pair of shoes because he had no right leg.

[Example 2C]

What? The story ends, but there is no ending. weird! I feel I am cheated by the author.

[Example 2D]

"The discus thrower" makes me think more and I am forced by the author to find out the answers. Under such kind of situations, I have to search meanings by myself. I feel great ... sort of feel beyond the author's control. As to "A passage to India", the answer is already in the story so I just have to read it over.

[Example 2E]

"The discus thrower" is worth reading for a couple of times and the funniest thing is I never complete understand what the story is about. Instead, the more times I read, the more I feel confused. This is a great story.

[Example 2F]

I like this story [The discus thrower] because I need to think and re-think. I have so many questions in my mind after reading it. But the more I think about it, the more I feel interested in the story. I It is like eating peanuts, the more I eat, the more I want to eat.

[Example 2G]

I don't feel like reading it [A passage to India] for the second time. It is very plain, like a story on the soap opera. This story [A passage to India] is full of questions and of thoughts. As a

reader, I feel there is a battle between me and the author. The author seems throwing a lot of questions for me as a reader to find out the answers. But I have more questions when I read it for a couple of times. Maybe this is what the author's intention is.

From the above examples, it is obvious that some participants (Examples 2A,2B, and 2C) seemed to more comfortable with closure-oriented reading perspectives. They believed that in any story the author provides a so-called ending, so they usually felt satisfied with "A passage to India" because it had a definite beginning and ending. Such conventional notions made them very uncomfortable in their relationship with the author when they read "The discus thrower." Under such circumstances, their dissatisfication, disappointment and suspense were transformed into irritation and dissatisfication, and since they were not able to obtain what they anticipated, a satisfactory settlement from the author, the communication between the participant and the author did arise, but then soon vanished.

In contrast, some, but only a few, were more interested in building bridges of interconnectedness from their own resources. When they encountered a realm of uncertainty and unpredictability, they looked forward, looked backward, decided, and changed their decision, framed and re-framed their expectations in order to fill in the "blanks" or "gaps" (Examples 2D, 2E, and 2F). More importantly, while realizing that it was their responsibility to 'interpret" the meaning elements provided by the author, some participants did clearly shift their stances, from viewing "The discus thrower" as a matter of dissatisfaction or nuisance into evaluating the story as "interesting," "worth thinking about, " and a "realization of why [the author was ambiguous]."

To sum up, the anomalies of dissatisfaction, suspense, and surprise intensify reader's expectations as well as their distrust of those expectations. Reading becomes a communication,a dialogue between the reader and the author, not a monologue.

Reading as reflexivity

Reflexivity is a self-use process of learning -- the use of self as an active sign in the reading

process (Watson, Burke & Harste, 1989). The process of reflexivity not only maintains readers' perspectives and propels their reading process, but also encourages them to take a step back and be reflective with regard to their reading task and toward themselves as readers, thinkers and learners in general. When my participants stood back from the reading tasks and examined the way they read and why they read this way, reflexive thinking was naturally emerged. Reflexivity is viewed, in this paper, as the action that allowed participants to be able to turn their experiences into learning or to apply their experiences in new contexts. Participants did not "fade into the woodwork," but instead, became a significant part of what was being read. the following examples demonstrate such situations.

[Example 3A]

> *... So far, I don't quite understand what the story is really about. I think I read too fast so that I am very easy to lose the comprehension ... I should slow down my reading speed. I now realize that I skip the parts of the texts being read. ... I think next time when I read I should write down something on the margin of the texts in order not to read too fast.*

[Example 3B]

> *After reading two stories, I started thinking about some questions. What if I were the characters in the stories, what could I do? Would I face the death as optimistically and peacefully as the girl? Would I have courage to face the death? If I were the discus thrower, would I throw plates at the wall? That attitude would I take if I were the doctor? Would I be as kind as the doctor? what does death mean to me? Everybody will undergo the death once in his/her life. Now, I see their death. When will it happen to me and in what way? I feel human beings are so little and fragile. I don't know whetherI cannot get any answers now ... I have never thought about the death before but I have started thinking about it.*

[Example 3C]

> *I felt sad, very sad, after re-reading the story. I felt sometimes I am just like the nurse, indifferent and inconsiderate to those whom I encountered, especially when I am busy.*

[Example 3D]

> *Sometimes, I admired the nurse's patience. She was greater than the doctor because she had to clean these dirty stuffs.*

Apparently, from Examples 3A, 3B, 3C and 3D, what these participants were currently experiencing, not only reflected upon their past, as readers and thinkers, but also intended to reconstruct their current experiences so that they would be able to further grow and improve in their ways of learning. Such connected ways of knowing empowered them to act upon their reading world.

Reflexivity was one of the keys that made some participants benefit more than others. However, it sometimes required that participants be vulnerable since they might have to face a shadow self, a self which they were not happy to discover. In this sense, some participants were able not only to move from reflecting on the reading strategies they employed, but also to think about how the strategies could be used in a broader reading situation. The following examples illuminate such situations.

[Example 3E]

> *I pay a pity for myself. I always read analytically, even reading a story. I think I have to be aware of the purpose of reading. Different types of texts should be read in different ways. I think I am a serious reader.*

[Example 3F]

> *Through the whole process, I started thinking "why I read and think this way" ...When I retrospect on myself, I wonder what type of reader I want to be, an emotional reader, reading along with the author, or an analytical reader, detaching myself from the text. ... I think I want to be a critical reader and I do not know how to do it, but I started thinking about how.*

In conclusion, reflexivity is itself an experience, and not an end. It is a re-constructive and re-productive process, by which participants could intentionally examine their reading events, beliefs, and behaviors, as well as make more of each experience. From this view, learning becomes self-directed process, in which participants realized what they needed. Reflexivity

expresses an orientation to action and because it concerns the relationship between thought and action; reflexivity becomes a power readers choose to exercise in the analysis and transformation of the situations in which they find themselves when they pause to reflect.

Reading as re-contextualization

When readers are allowed to re-visit the texts, they are not only interested in infusing meanings into their continuously re-constructed personal webs of meaning, but they are also interested in considering the implications of the constructedness of the text "out there" and in exploring its connectedness to themselves (Harste, 1988). Thus, re-contextualization assists participants to take their knowledge or what they knew about a topic and transformed and recast that knowledge onto another particular context. Such a change is a text-shaping and text-creating process; readers create the right text for the right context.

When my participants recast their interpretations, understandings, explanations and beliefs on new "planes" of expression, these "planes changed not only the textual meaning but also the participants themselves. When an interpretation developed in participants' minds, they had the opportunity to integrate their own values, ideas, beliefs and attitudes, and they used these opportunities for the development of the self. My participants offered good examples of the process of re-contexualization in action as they were invited to re-read the texts, making additional comments.

[Example 4A]

> *...I am pretty touched by the doctor's attitudes toward the patient because I have similar experiences. When I am sick, I feel weak. If the doctor is able to have a little bit of sympathy for me, I will feel better. The doctor [in the story] is very considerate...*

[Example 4B]

> *when I first read the story, I paid a pity on the girl's death. But after re-reading it, I sense it would be better for her to die, die peacefully...*

14

[Example 4C]

> *When I first read the story, I thought the girl was treated as an experimental animal. But, now I don't think so. I don't think the girl is ...Maybe the experiment is involved during the process, but the intention of the doctor, like the one in the movie "The Awakening" is to cure the girl rather than to do some experiment on her.*

Apparently, these participants [Examples 4A, 4B, and 4C] obviously became more involved not only at the interpretative level, but also in making more in-depth and sophisticated interpretative connections. After having become familiar with the story lines, they tended not only to bring their own judgments, decisions, values, and concerns to the texts, but also to bring new thoughts, self-realizations, self-redefinitions, or self-corrections, to enrich their previous interpretations.

In the process of re-contextualization, my participants intended to share their joy, fear, warmth in the story as well as their values, beliefs, judgments, and preferences; as a result, they took an idea, expanded it, an added to it, and were also allowed to hear alternative explanations and interpretations, and to revise their meanings if they thought alternative explanations and interpretations were more appropriate. The following examples exemplifies.

[Example 4D]

> *When I re-read the story, I suddenly realize that the author uses RM 542 [Room 542] to represent the patient. The patient is only one case or even a nobody. From this point of view, I feel the doctor is cold. Although he is not a bad doctor and although he is trying to help his patient, he is not so much perfect as I felt for the first time when I read it. I have fantasized the doctor.*

[Example 4E]

> *I changed my stance toward A passage to India. It is very plain. I felt touched for the first time when I read it but I can not enjoy it for the second time. All that I need to know has been given the first timeof reading.*

[Example 4F]

Now, I realize how important it is for him to throw eggs at the wall.
When I understand this, the whole story makes sense to me.

Re-contextualization should be regarded as an interpretive playground upon which readers are allowed to come up with any interpretation they want based upon their own particular way of seeing the world. Readers' ideologies shape their perceptual apparatus which, in turn, transforms the text (Myers, 1988). As a result, meaning gathers meaning and so does interpretation. Meaning and interpretation begin to snowball through the act of re-contextualization.

CONCLUSION

The entire reading process involved searching for meaning, correcting errors, seeking out the sources of response, speculating about the author's intent, and weighing the author's values and ideas against one's own, all of which culminated in a sharpened, heightened sense of self. In this sense, reading became a process of transaction, during which my participants owned and negotiated meaning, and, in turn, inquired and grew.

Although my participants were all advanced ESL students, their reading strategies were not entirely mature and proficient all the time. Thus, the more flexible and the less flexible reading each became an end point on a continuum, along which real-life readers moved even within single texts. Many of them not only made meaningful and personal sense of the text, but also allowed themselves to tussle with the problems of making a personal meaning and to emerge from that struggle with their own constructed meaning, a process through which they allowed the self to be molded as part of the complex and dynamic mental trip that reading permits. Reading for them involved private, idiosyncratic, and hypothesis-generating responses. Through such responses, my participants gained the opportunity to see, judge, and re-shape their responses, by consulting their own hearts and minds, realizing that they were the ones ultimately responsible for what they became. More importantly, by becoming aware of their orientations, stances, and purposes toward reading, some of them might be transformed from less flexible readers to more flexible readers.

As indicated in my study, meaning legitimately varied for different individuals and for different contexts. My participants always altered their original interpretations and stretched their comprehension by adding to, elaborating, and revising the mental texts they created as they re-read, re-thought, or read multiple texts. Meaning negotiation made my participants take into account their varying perspectives -- what they knew or didn't know.

IMPLICATIONS

This investigation has implications for research and for pedagogical practice. As with all research on the reading process, the patterns delineated in this study must be considered as postulates to be researched in future studies conducted with larger numbers and different levels of ESL/EFL students. However, some pedagogical implications can be deduced even at this early stage.

First, since reading is a process of transaction, ESL/EFL students can benefit if ESL/EFL teachers learn to respect students' meaning-making rather than trying to impart their own interpretations to students. As shown in my study, the reader-response approach provided readers with an opportunity to engage in a natural meaning-making process -- a natural part of the generative process that readers used to arrive at text meaning, and which further embodied the potential to engage readers' interest and stimulate their thinking.

Second, the reader-response approach should not be limited to oral reflection. Ungraded journals and free-writing can be used as alternative modes in place of everyday drills. More importantly, these two rudimentary writing activities can support readers by freeing them from the constraints of looking for "the right way" and the "one correct answer," so that they will ultimately see language as a critical tool to manage their own words and worlds.

Third, my study reveals that in the process of reading, ESL/EFL students should be encouraged to embrace difficulty, ambiguity, confusion and divergence, rather than be led to shy away from them. Last but least important, as shown in this study, it was very difficult to distinctly

categorize flexible and non-flexible readings in that a reader was more flexible one moment and then less flexible the next. The degree of flexibility varied based upon the reader's range of orientations, assumptions, and beliefs. Thus, it would be effective for ESL/EFL teachers to broaden all their students' range of orientations, assumptions, and beliefs, in order to help their students to become more flexible.

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APPENDIX 1A: THE DISCUS THROWER

I spy on my patients. Ought not a doctor to observe his patients by any means and from any stance, that he might the more fully assemble evidence? So I stand in the doorways of hospital rooms and gaze. Oh, it is not all that furtive and act. Those in bed need only look up to discover me. But they never do.

From the doorway of Room 542 the man in the bed seems deeply tanned. Blue eyes and close-cropped white hair give him the appearance of vigor and good health. But I know that his skin is not brown from the sun. It is rusted, rather, in the last stage of containing the vile repose within. And the blue eyes are frosted, looking inward like the windows of a snowbound cottage. This man is blind. This man is also legless -- the right leg missing from midthigh down, the left from just below the knee. It gives him the look of a bonsai, roots and branches pruned into the dwarfed facsimile of a great tree.

Propped on pillows, he cups his right thigh in both hands. Now and then he shakes his head as though acknowledging the intensity of his suffering. In all of this he makes no sound. Is he mute as well as blind?

The room in which he dwells is empty of all possessions -- no get-well cards, small, private caches of food, day-old flowers, slippers, all the usual kickshaws of the sickroom. There is only the bed, a chair, a nightstand, and a tray on wheels that can be swung across his lap for meals.

"What time is it?" he asks.

"Three o'clock."

"Morning or afternoon?"

"Afternoon."

He is silent. There is nothing else he wants to know.

"How are you?" I say.

"Who is it?" he asks.

"It's the doctor. How do you feel?"

He does not answer right away.

"Feel?" he says.

"I hope you feel better," I say.

I press the button at the side of the bed.

"Down you go?" I say.

"Yes, down," he says.

He falls back upon the bed awkwardly. His stumps, unweighted by legs and feet, rise in the air, presenting themselves. I unwrap the bandages from the stumps, and begin to cut away the black scabs and the dead, glazed fat with scissors and forceps. A shard of white bone comes loose. I pick it away. I wash the wounds with disinfectant and redress the stumps. All this while, he does not speak. What is he thinking behind those lids that do not blink? Is he remembering a time when he was whole? Does he dream of feet? Of when his body was not a rotting log?

He lies solid and inert. In spite of everything, he remains impressive, as though he were a sailor standing stewart a slanting deck.

"Anything more I can do for you?" I ask.

For a long moment he is silent.

"Yes," he says at last and without the least irony. "You can bring me a pair of shoes."

In the corridor, the head nurse is waiting for me.

"We have to do something about him,"she says. "Every morning he orders scrambled eggs for breakfast, and instead of eating them, he picks up the plate and throws it against the wall."

"Throw his plate?"

"Nasty. that's what he is. No wonder his family doesn't come to visit. They probably can't stand him any more than we can."

She is waiting for me to do something.

"Well?"

"We'll see," I say.

The next morning I am waiting in the corridor when the kitchen delivers his breakfast. I watch the side place the tray on the stand and swing it across his lap. She presses the button to raise the head of the bed. Then she leaves. In time the man reaches to find the rim of the tray, then on to find the dome of the covered dish. He lifts off the cover and places it on the stand. He fingers across the plate until he probes the eggs. he lifts the plate in both hands, sets it on the palm of his right hand, centers it, balances it. He lifts it up and down slightly, getting the feel of it. Abruptly, he draws back his right arm as fast as he can.

There is the crack of the plate breaking against the wall at the foot of his bed and the small wet sound of the scrambled eggs dropping to the floor.

And then he laughs. It is a sound you have never heard. it is something new under the sun. It could cure cancer.

Out in the corridor, the eyes of the head nurse narrow.

"Laughed, did he?"

She writes something down on her clipboard.

A second side arrives, brings a second breakfast tray, put it on the nightstand, out of his reach.

She looks over at me shaking her head and making her mouth go. I see that we are to be accomplices.

"I've got to feed you," she says to the man.

"Oh, no you don't," the man says.

"Oh, yes I do," the side says, "after the way you just did. Nurse says so."

"Here's oatmeal," the side says. "Open." And she touches the spoon to his lower lip.

"I ordered scrambled eggs,"says the man.

"That's right," the side says.

I step forward.

"Is there anything I can do?" I say.

"Who are you?" the man asks.

In the evening I go once more to that ward to make my rounds. The head nurse reports to me that Room 542 is deceased. She has discovered this quite by accident, she says. No, there had been no sound. Nothing. It's a blessing, she says.

I go into his room, a spy looking for secrets. He is still there in his bed. His face is relaxed, grave, dignified. After a while, I turn to leave. My gaze sweeps the wall at the foot of the bed, and I see the place where it has been repeatedly washed, where the wall looks very clear and very white.

Appendix 1B: *A Passage to India*

Bhagawhandi P., an Indian girl of 19 with a malignant brain tumour, was admitted to our hospice in 1978. The tumour -- an astrocytoma -- had first presented when she was seven, but was then of low malignancy, and well circumscribed, allowing a complete resection, and complete return of function, and allowing Bhagawhandi to return to normal life.

This reprieve lasted for ten years, during which she lived life to the full, lived it gratefully and consciously to the full, for she knew (she was a bright girl) that she had a 'time bomb' in her head.

In her eighteenth year, the tumour recurred, much more invasive and malignant now, and no longer removable. A decompression was performed to allow its expansion -- and it was with this, with weakness and numbness of the left side, with occasional seizures and other problems, that Bhagawhandi was admitted.

She was, at first, remarkably cheerfully, seeming to accept fully the fate which lay in store, but still eager to be with people and do things, enjoy and experience as long as she could. As the tumour inched forward to her temporal lobe and the decompression starred to bulge (we put her on steroids to reduce cerebral oedema) her seizures became more frequent and stranger.

The original seizures were grand mal convulsions, and these she continued to have on occasion. Her new ones had a different character altogether. She would not lose consciousness, but she would look (and feel) 'dreamy'; and it was easy to ascertain (and confirm by EEG) that she was now having frequent temporal-lobe seizures, which, as Hughlings Jackson taught, are often characterized by 'dreamy states' and involuntary 'reminiscence'.

Soon this vague dreaminess took on a more defined, more concrete, and more visionary character. It now took the form of visions of India -- landscapes, villages, homes, gardens -- known and loved as a child.

'Do these distress you?' we asked. "We can change the medication.'

'No,' she said, with a peaceful smile, 'I like these dreams -- they take me back home.'

At times there were people, usually her family or neighbours from her home village; sometimes there was speech, or singing, or dancing; once she was in a church, once in a graveyard; but mostly there were the plains, the fields, the rice paddies near her village, and the low, sweet hills which sept up to the horizon.

Were these all temporal-lobe seizures? This first seemed the case, but now we were less sure; for temporal-seizures (as Hughlings Jackson emphasised, and Wilder Penfield was able by stimulation of the exposed brain to confirm -- see 'Reminiscence') tend to have a rather fixed format: a single scene or song, unvaryingly reiterated, going with an equally fixed focus in the cortex. Whereas Bhagawhandi's dreams had no such fixity, but presented ever-changing panoramas and dissolving landscapes to her eye. Was she then toxic and hallucinating from the massive doses of steroids she was now receiving? This seemed possible, but we could not reduce the steroids -- she would have gone into coma and died within days.

And a 'steroid psychosis', so-called, is often excited and disorganised, whereas Bhagawhandi was always lucid, peaceful and calm. Could they be in the Freudian sense, phantasies or dreams? Or the sort of dream-madness (oneirophrenial) which may sometimes occur in schizophrenia? Here again we could not be certain; for though there was a phantasmagoria of sorts, yet the phantasms were clearly all memories. They occurred side by side with normal awareness and consciousness (Hughlings Jackson, as we have seen, speaks of a 'doubling of consciousness'), and they were not obviously 'over-cathected', or charged with passionate drives. They seemed more like certain paintings, or tone poems, sometimes happy, sometimes sad, evocations, revocations, visitations to and from a loved and cherished childhood.

Day by day, week by week, the dreams, the visions, came oftener, grew deeper. They were not occasional now, but occupied most of the day. We would see her rapt, as if in a trance, her eyes sometimes closed, sometimes open but any one approached her, or asked her something, as the nurses had to do, she would respond at once, lucidly and courteously, but there was, even among the most down-to-earth staff, a feeling that she was in another world, and that we should not interrupt her. I shared this feeling and, though curious, was reluctant to probe. Once, just once, I said: 'Bhagawhandi, what is happening?'

'I am dying,' she answered. 'I am going home. I am going back where I came from --you might call it my return.'

Another week passed, and now Bhagawhandi no longer responded to external stimuli, but seemed wholly enveloped in a world of her own, and, though her eyes were closed, her face still bore its faint, happy smile. 'She's on the return journey,' the staff said. "She'll soon be there.' Three days later she died -- or should we say she 'arrived', having completed her passage to India?